Reading and Responding to the Child's Non-Verbal Signals

Should I ask the child to use pictures to say what he is communicating without words?

If the child is communicating a message with a gesture and the message is clear, you don't need to prompt him/her to use the device but you can take advantage of the opportunity to MODEL communication with the device.

When modeling, imagine you are adding close captions to a silent movie

- Look at what the child is doing, feeling, looking

- Look at what is happening around you and the child

- Acknowledge what you see by saying it out loud and pointing to pictures matching what you are saying. For example:

  o "I see you want to go outside" (you point to OUTSIDE or GO + OUTSIDE)
  o "It's raining" (you point to RAIN)
  o "I see you like that Dora book" (you point to LIKE or LIKE + DORA)

When reading and responding to the child's non-verbal signals keep in mind that you don't have to honour each demand, but you have to ACKNOWLEDGE the child's non-verbal signals and, whenever possible, provide feedback using pictures. Examples:

  o "We'll go outside later, in a few minutes" (you point to OUTSIDE + LATER)
  o "I'm sorry you don't like it here, we'll leave soon" (you point to SOON)

Generally speaking you should prompt the child to communicate with pictures only for messages containing words/phrases that you have chosen or planned to teach.

When choosing what words to teach, follow the **"3F rule".** Select words and messages that are:
- Functional i.e., useful things that the child cannot communicate efficiently with gestures only
- Fun i.e., motivating messages that have a clear pay-off for the child
- Fast i.e., messages that the child can communicate in a quick, efficient manner

Children need modeling, opportunities, explicit instruction and appropriate prompts to learn to use pictures as communication tools. Make sure you have a PLAN for teaching.

Garcia A. 2016-01-29